

CANADIAN POETRY: OUR DEBT TO SPAIN

World War I saw Canadian writers revealing themselves as members of the "Maple Leaf School": that is to say as blindly chauvinistic, blatantly sentimental. The novelists were following the pattern of Ralph Connor and his books The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land (the padre urging on the troops) or To Him that Hath (the resolution of the Winnipeg Strike through brotherly love). There appear to have been only two attempts at a political and objective analysis of the war and its aftermath, in the works of two men who are still relatively ~~xxxxxx~~ unknown and unpraised. I refer to Harrison's Generals Die in Bed and Douglas Durkin's The Magpie. Here for the first time in Canada war is seen not as glorious sacrifice, but as brutish and mad; and the desire to build a new world for the returned soldiers and their families is a strong theme in The Magpie. But generally speaking the <sup>Voluntary</sup> themes of prose and poetry in the twenties are replete with political naivete. Attitudes of <sup>entrenched</sup> ~~of~~ optimism, arrogant individualism combine with ~~entrenched~~ conservatism. It was not until the 1930's, when the entire ~~fabrix~~ social fabric of the nation collapsed at the onset of breadlines, evictions, ruthless police provocation and attacks on strikers, that what could be called political consciousness began to grow in the minds of Canadians--whether they were in trade unions, unorganized, unemployed, or in professions such as teaching, law, social work, journalism. Thus, to understand what the events in Spain meant to Canadian writers and poets it is needful to examine the years between 1930 and 1935. A social worker, Margaret Gould, summed up the period in these words:

When the poor in Canada try to help themselves by organizing into unions and striking for better conditions and pay, the militia is called out to crush them, as in Stratford. When they organize for a decent standard of relief, tear bombs are <sup>THROWN</sup> ~~xxxxxx~~ thrown at them, as in Vancouver. Or they are ejected from the ~~xxxxxx~~ City Hall, as in Toronto. Or they are routed out ~~xxxxxx~~ of their homes and flung into prison, as in York County, Ontario.

The shame and disgrace of this situation was depressing not only for those involved, but for the onlookers--some of whom were writers. One reaction was ironic despair: invective and satire. Another, ~~x~~ was quite the opposite: a determination to fight for changes, a desire to build a new world where there would be justice and a good living for all. ~~xxxxxx~~ ~~These two themes emerge~~ dramatically when ~~thax~~ in July, 1936, Spain's The moment of decision came ^